

Campaign Finance Disclosure in Municipal Elections

About OCPF

The Office of Campaign and Political Finance is the independent state agency that administers Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 55, the campaign finance law. OCPF receives disclosure reports from political committees organized on the state level, including candidates for statewide and county office, the Legislature and the Governor's Council, as well as filings from political action committees, ballot question committees and state and local party committees. OCPF also receives reports from mayoral and councilor-at-large candidates in the state's five largest cities -- Boston, Cambridge, Lowell, Springfield and Worcester.

All other municipal candidates and committees file their reports with their respective city or town clerks or election commissions. OCPF works with these local officials to ensure compliance with the campaign finance law, supplying disclosure forms and providing guidance to officials, candidates and the public.

Filing Reports

In **towns**, candidates file two campaign finance reports, due eight days before and 30 days after the election. This filing requirement also applies to ballot question committees organized to support or oppose local questions such as Proposition 2½ overrides. Unlike other committees, however, ballot question committees must disband after the relevant election.

In **cities**, three reports are usually due: eight days before both the preliminary and final elections and on the following Jan. 20. All candidates file before the preliminary election, even if their particular races are not on the ballot until November.

In addition to the filing requirements noted above, all candidates, including all incumbent elected officials, and all active committees such as local ballot question committees file year-end reports each Jan. 20.

Local candidates who do not file campaign finance reports are subject to a \$10 per day fine levied by OCPF after referral by the city or town clerk or election commission.

Contributions

Contributions to candidates and political committees in Massachusetts are subject to maximum aggregate amounts set by law. Limits on the most common types of contributions are as follows (all limits listed are for a calendar year):

- o The maximum amount an individual may donate to a **candidate** is \$500 per year. There is no limit on how much a candidate may contribute to his or her own campaign for local office.
- o A candidate or candidate committee may contribute up to \$100 per year to **another candidate or candidate committee**.

- o **Corporate contributions to candidates** are prohibited, as are contributions from PACs that are not organized with OCPF or local officials, such as federal PACs or those registered in another state.
- o Individuals and corporations may contribute without limit to **ballot question committees**.

Candidates and committees must maintain detailed records of all contributions, including the name and address of contributors of any amount. The name and address of any contributor of over \$50 in the aggregate per year must be disclosed on a campaign finance report. Recipients of contributions must also ask for the occupation and employer of those who give \$200 or more in a calendar year, though a contributor may decline to provide such information.

Expenditures

Expenditures by all candidates and committees must adhere to two statutory standards set forth in Chapter 55. Candidates and committees must be able to demonstrate that any expenditure meets the statutory standard.

- o Expenditures must enhance the political future of the candidate or advance the principles for which a committee was founded, such as the passage of a ballot question.
- o Expenditures must not be primarily for the personal use of any person, including a candidate.

Candidates and committees must maintain detailed records of all expenditures. Expenditures of more than \$50 must be itemized on a campaign finance report.

Public Outreach

OCPF staff members are available to conduct seminars for candidates and committees in any city or town, as well as orientation sessions for new clerks or elections staff. The office also offers a seminar on the application of the campaign finance law in ballot question elections, including reporting requirements for ballot spending and the restriction on the use of public resources to influence voters. For more information, contact OCPF's Director of Public Information, Denis Kennedy at the number below or by e-mail at dkennedy@cpf.state.ma.us.

For further information on the campaign finance law and its application to campaigns and candidates, contact OCPF at the number below or visit the office's website.

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